

Boston Chapter of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People

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MM Docket #95-176

JAN 29 1996

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C.. 20554

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Comments of the Boston Chapter of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People to
NOI MM Docket No. 95-176:

The Boston Chapter of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People wishes to reply to your NOI on closed captioning. Our group of about 60 hard of hearing members is one of several SHHH groups in the Boston area. Our members have hearing losses that range from moderate to profound. We find that closed captioning is very vital to us as hard of hearing individuals, enhancing both the quality and safety of our lives.

Television is such a tremendous and wide-ranging force in American life today. Much of today's information, from sports to local and national news and to emergency information, is transmitted verbally across television. Ten percent of Americans, the hearing impaired, are denied access to this force, if there is no captioning. Because they cannot hear or hear well enough, they are literally cut off from one of society's main streams, as will be explained some more in the next paragraph. So the question arises: how much of TV is not captioned, and therefore excludes the deaf and hard of hearing? We have not made a systematic study, and we recognize that some stations have made important progress in captioning a significant fraction of their programs. However, this is not true for the majority of stations, at least in the Boston area. Let us simply state one fact to indicate the depth of the problem: of the nine broadcast TV stations in the Boston area only three regularly caption the local news. The rest do not.

Communication via language differentiates human beings from all other living creatures. People are social beings and it is through speaking and hearing that one of their fundamental needs is fulfilled. Life without verbal communication is isolated, drab, and depressive. Advances in assistive technology for hearing impaired people can make the difference between living in isolation and continuing to be part of the world at large. Captioning is one of these technologies that enable hearing impaired to lead informed,

full, and rewarding lives. Hearing loss is not simply an issue of aging. It affects children, young adults, and adults. Captioning is necessary for them to remain an active part of the larger community. Captioning provides them with informational and cultural equality. Our experience is that captioning or its absence is one of the topics discussed most frequently in our group meetings.

The quality of captioning is quite variable. Often letters are missing and words are totally incomprehensible. Sometimes captions do not reflect what the speaker is saying. Many times captioning is poorly synchronized with the actual speaking. People often find that in conversation the speaker is not identified, making the conversation very confusing. The question of making captioning more readable should be studied. For example, the color yellow might be a much better color for captioning. White often gets lost in the background. The placement of the captions should not interfere with any other writing on the screen. Obviously this is very frustrating and confusing. Altogether here is a lot of room for improvement in the quality of captioning for live and prerecorded programming.

Emergency broadcasts should always be captioned. The announcement introducing the emergency broadcast should also be captioned. These are messages which are put out onto the televised airwaves to alert people to emergencies, and to inform them of where to go and what to do and how to proceed to obtain more information. For people without their full sense of hearing, not to understand any of the messages may be more anxiety provoking than the situation can tolerate. An emergency is a time when a person needs to keep their wits about them. To be thrown into a state of panic because you couldn't understand the message is potentially lethal and certainly unjustified. Here captioning becomes a critical item for the safety of the hearing impaired.

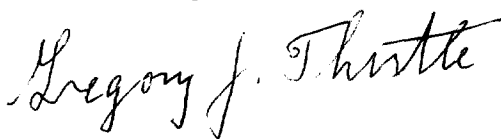
Our recommendations are as follows:

The FCC should immediately require that emergency broadcasts be captioned.

All news broadcasts should be captioned within a year.

All T.V. and cable T.V. stations should be required to fully caption all of their programs by the year 2000.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gregory J. Thistle".

Gregory J. Thistle
President